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A "SYMPOSIUM" UPON THE ADVISABILITY OF A NORMAL DEPARTMENT IN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES.

One of the objects contemplated in the work of the STUDENT is to advance the interests of Bible study, and to help in opening the way to the wider usefulness of agencies for this purpose already existing. Not a little has been said recently in many quarters of the need of a better knowledge of the Bible as a whole on the part of Theological students. Without disparaging in any respect the work of our Theological Institutions, many of whose teachers are working beyond their strength to supply what they recognize to be the needs of students, it seemed to promise help and light to make inquiries of working clergymen, teachers in college and seminary, Sunday school workers and other intelligent observers. The following questions were sent out and replies are here given.

1. What do you think in regard to the necessity of the minister being a skillful teacher of the Bible?
2. Is it or is it not wise to add a department or a course to our theological curriculum for the purpose of doing this work, and what might be urged as reasons for such a step?
3. Are there not some suggestions which you would be willing to make in regard to the subject in general of the minister as a teacher of the Bible?

From Rev. JOSEPH COOK, D. D.

In reply to your three strategic questions in your letter of May 8, I beg leave to say with all deference towards our eminent theological teachers, that our average American ministry ought to be educated to greater skill in teaching the Bible both to learned and to unlearned hearers. Few preachers in our time are so equipped as to be able to repel by clear and candid reasoning the more novel and subtle attacks of skeptical critics of the Bible. Few are so familiar with the mountain ranges of Scripture as to be able to lead congregations to spiritual heights from which the outlook dispels skepticism. It is absolutely indispensable that the ministry of our day should be able to perform easily and often these two majestic tasks. As to whether theological seminaries need a new department to fit men for this work, I am in some doubt. The chairs of Biblical Theology and of Homiletics ought to cover the required instruction. But the *whole* armor of God is to be put on by spiritual leaders in the church and it is the business of theological seminaries to forge and fit to each other *all* the parts of this armor, even if a few new anvils are required for the perfection of the process. The *use* of armor is the duty of preachers, but the *forging* of it is the duty of their instructors. The Bible is breast-plate, helmet and sword.

Boston, Mass.

From Rev. A. J. GORDON, D. D.

Bible-readings, so called, are now largely employed by the lay evangelists of the Moody school. Let scholars disparage them as they will, these Bible-readings conform to right methods ; that of comparative Scriptural study. It is a simple method, to which the Concordance furnishes the principal aid ; but it is an effective method for interesting and instructing the people. We wish that this manner of preaching might largely supplement the present form of formal sermonizing. The demand of President Wayland, that theological students should be "taught to think on their feet," we would reinforce by another ; that they be instructed to expound on their feet, so that having stated their doctrine or proposition they should go from cover to cover of their Bibles in proving and illustrating the same. Yes, I heartily approve of your suggestion.

Boston, Mass.

From Rev. Professor GEO. B. STEVENS, PH. D.

Replying to your favor in regard to the necessity of a course or department in theological seminaries for the instruction of young men as teachers of the Bible I would say, that the subject commends itself to my mind as one of great importance.

Your first question whether it is important that a minister be a skilled teacher of the Bible must surely be answered in the affirmative. My own conviction is that one of the greatest deficiencies in ministers so far as imparting thorough instruction in the Bible is concerned, is found in the fact that they are not thoroughly acquainted with the subject themselves. The courses in theological seminaries have generally been so restricted in their scope that not more than three or four books of the Old and New Testaments respectively have been studied during the course.

These may have been very exhaustively studied and well understood, but such a course of instruction is certainly wanting in that range and comprehensiveness which are necessary to furnish one for effective teaching of the Bible as a whole. It is my belief that there is occasion for some modification in this respect in our theological courses, as ordinarily planned.

I believe, for example, in respect to the New Testament, that every student on his graduation from the seminary should know the things most important to be known about each book of the New Testament ; that he should have its main contents clearly in mind, have clear understanding of its occasion, purpose and leading books, and be able to interpret each passage of the book in the light of this information.

Replying to your second question, it does not seem clear to me that a separate department or new course of instruction with reference to this work is needful. I think however that it should receive attention. Could it not, at least in a measure, be introduced in connection with our teaching of interpretation, by requiring the students to interpret for themselves and to bring before the class examples of their own work in exegesis and to present before the class as if they were called upon to give instruction in the matter in hand the results of their own study, bringing forward such points as they would judge to be of importance in case they themselves were the teachers? It ap-

pears to me that by the assignment to students of work of this character in the different branches and departments of our biblical teaching, that something could be done in the direction which your question indicates.

In regard to the third point I would say that the demand has not hitherto been often made that a minister should be a systematic teacher of the Bible. It has been felt to be enough if he could clearly and helpfully interpret its truth in preaching. This demand however will more and more be made of him, since the interest in systematic biblical study is becoming more wide spread. He cannot therefore be too well furnished for work like this, and, even if he should not be called upon to give any systematic course of instruction, the work which he would be required to do in preparing himself to do so would be of great assistance to his use of the Bible in preaching. It would give him a well poised judgment in respect to the force and meaning of the texts which he might employ, and would save him from those extravagances and erroneous emphases which are so commonly connected with the use of individual passages of Scripture. That ministers should be acquainted with the Bible as literature, and with its books in their entire scope and purpose, appears to me to be a matter of the utmost importance.

New Haven, Conn.

FROM REV. SMITH BAKER, D. D.

I am convinced more and more that the coming pastor, must be a teacher as well as preacher and also a teacher of teachers and in thus doing he will add to the richness of his preaching as well as qualify his people for greater usefulness. Ministers make a great mistake in not studying the art of Bible-teaching. Among the richest experiences of my ministerial life, is my Bible-class of two hundred members.

I have for years felt a sad deficiency on the part of our theological seminaries in this direction. With a somewhat extensive experience in connection with Sunday school institutes for twenty-five years, I have found the majority of our ministers unqualified to lead their Sunday school teachers, in Bible study or in the methods of teaching. They can make good speeches and read good essays but as for helping the teacher to teach, they knew not how to do it. Indeed some of our most learned men are most deficient in this respect, and it seems to me, with the increasing attention now given to Bible study, that one of the most imperative needs in our theological seminaries is a department in the art of Bible-teaching. To know the truth is not enough. To know how to teach the truth is quite as important.

Lowell, Mass.

FROM REV. PROF. J. STEINFORT KEDNEY, D. D.

In response to the questions asked, I can but say, (1) that there can be no question that every minister should be, if possible, a skillful teacher of the Bible. (2) If a department having this for its purpose, or a function of an existing one, could be added to any course of theological study, it would be a

desideratum. (3) In the Theological School with which I am connected, we shall be glad to receive any suggestion having for its end an improvement of our curriculum in this regard ; though it is difficult to see how a new department could be added to the same without extending our course of study, since the time of our young men is now fully occupied.

Individually I have to say that I should like to see the working of any method of teaching the Holy Scriptures before giving it my unqualified approbation. I see clearly that there are at least three distinct methods of interpreting Holy Scriptures, each having its particular worth, and possible adaptation to a particular class of learners, and yet that there is a certain kind of *information*, which is or should be common to them all, and the basis from which they proceed. It is this last, I take it, that you have specially in view.

Fairbault, Minn.

From Rev. C. R. BLACKALL, M. D.

1. There cannot be any question as to the necessity that every minister of the Gospel should be "a skillful teacher of the Bible." Without that qualification he had far better be earning a living in some other way. The Gospel requirement is that he should be "*apt to teach.*"

2. Every Theological Seminary should have, as part of its curriculum, a department that would prepare its students to *teach*, as well as to *preach*, and this department should include all that pertains to the practical working of Sunday schools, in which a large part of personal teaching is done, not only to the unconverted, but also to church members. So far as my observation extends, comparatively few professing Christians have been so instructed in doctrine that it makes any particular difference where they belong, in church relation, except from social or personal considerations. I regard this as a result of the fact that "doctrinal" preaching and teaching is so generally avoided ; that in so large degree pastors leave the Sunday school teaching and administration to others who are less qualified than themselves to instruct ; and that it is so common to regard "the teaching department of the church" as a separate "institution," with rules and regulations that separate it from the church. It never can be otherwise until pastors are better instructed along these lines, and come to their churches fully equipped by practical as well as theoretical knowledge.

3. The minister ought to be a regular teacher in the Sunday school of his church. Better, as a rule, one sermon and an effective teaching service, than two sermons and no teaching service. Better for him to be "servant to all," in this sense, than to be preacher to a few. In the vast majority of cases, if the pastor does not have the place in "the teaching service" that he ought to occupy, it is mainly his own fault. By the exercise of due activity, without self-assertion ; genuine interest in the work, with capacity to do it, and a reasonable amount of common sense, he can easily become what of right he should be, the leader in all departments of work in his church, and the best organizer of its forces for good.

Philadelphia, Penn.

From Professor WM. NORTH RICE.

In regard to the first question which you ask, it seems to me there can be no hesitation. Every minister ought to be a skillful teacher of the Bible. A minister who is a skillful teacher can often, I believe, accomplish more in a Bible-class than in his preaching. I think there is too much talking at people without giving them a chance to talk back. In the free interchange of thought which a Bible-class allows, the perplexities and difficulties, both theoretical and practical, which are felt by many thoughtful minds, are much more likely to be reached than in the formal sermon. As a rule, I think every minister ought to teach a Bible-class. Aside from the good which he could do in the class, the work would have great value in improving the character of his preaching. We need more expository preaching—less dogmatic, illustrative, and hortatory preaching. The preacher who has acquired in large degree the habit of thought of the biblical teacher, will teach the Bible in his sermons, and not treat the people to miscellaneous essays or emotional exhortations prefaced by a fragment of a sentence of the Bible torn from its context and utterly perverted in meaning. The only purely intellectual qualification of an elder, according to Paul, is to be “didaktikon”—a qualification now too sadly neglected.

In regard to the second question, I speak with more hesitation. I incline to think that the establishment of a Normal Department, or Department of Biblical Pedagogics, distinct from the departments of biblical study, would tend to emphasize unduly the subject of methods. There is something fearful in the cut-and-dried-ness of the less intellectually active among the graduates of Normal Schools. Methods are good, but the best method is a live teacher. While I should think it would be going too far to establish a Normal Department in the Seminaries, it would seem to me very desirable to have the subject of the teaching of the Bible brought before the students in the Seminaries in a course of lectures. Such a course might well serve to impress the minds of the students with the importance of the work; and the subject of methods might be treated in due proportion.

All that I should feel disposed to say on the third question I have said in answering the first.

Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn.